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Geneva

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 8 *(continued)*

Proposals for further initiatives for social development

(a) Review and appraisal of progress since the World Summit for Social Development

(b) Proposals for further initiatives for the full implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway.

Mr. Stoltenberg (Norway): The Social Summit in Copenhagen recalled the fundamentals of development: that people must come first; that development is never gained unless poverty is defeated; that development is never sustainable unless there is democracy and good governance; that development is never real unless people's social needs and rights are fully respected.

During the last years another lesson has been driven home once more: that the social needs of people cannot be left to the markets. Access to health, education and equitable distribution of welfare are not tradable commodities; no stock market can determine their value. They represent the crucial web which holds our societies together.

Today we gather to take stock and to revisit our ten commitments from Copenhagen. We have all the basic knowledge of what it will take to make a lasting difference in the struggle against poverty. Reaching the goal of halving world poverty by 2015 is a tall order. But it is possible. The many United Nations conferences have told us how. We now need stronger will to translate all that knowledge into action.

Let us make a real effort on human rights and labour rights. Development means respecting human rights — all of them, not some of them, civil and political as well as social and economic rights.

Poverty is a direct abuse of human dignity. Combating poverty is the most crucial task for securing the human rights of all.

Therefore, we must fight unemployment. We must call for the ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on basic workers' rights: the right to organize and bargain collectively; the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour. Some say that implementing labour rights holds back development. I say it is the other way around: fundamental workers' rights sustain development and foster democracy.

Let us make a real effort on debt relief. Without it, how can we expect poor countries to manage to invest in health, education and new infrastructure?

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Norway for its part has decided to forgive 100 per cent of the debts owed to it by the heavily indebted poor countries. I urge other creditor countries to do the same. Debt must be forgiven, but debt relief should not come at the expense of concessional lending to developing countries. The G-8 Summit next month must add new momentum to the process.

In Lisbon earlier this month donors agreed on the long-term financing requirements of debt relief. Based on this agreement, Norway has decided to contribute a further 37 million dollars to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Trust Fund, bringing our total contribution to 79 million dollars. A process of debt relief has been started, but there is still a long way to go.

Let us make a real effort on health. We have gained new insight into the link between ill health and poverty. A good health policy means less poverty. Nearly 1 billion people — every fifth person on earth — fall outside the scope of any health-care system. That is the drama we must address.

One concrete need is to secure the right of every child to be immunized against childhood killers. Today 30 million children do not have that right. As a consequence 3 million of them will die from diseases that are easily preventable. That amounts to six children every minute.

A global initiative is rising to meet the challenge. Norway lends it full support to the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunization. This is a unique initiative, responding to Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call for more effective private-public partnerships. My Government has pledged $125 million to support this initiative. Our aim is threefold: to help immunize every child, to build health systems which can secure that right for new generations, and to support the vital research for new vaccines against killers such as malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS.

Let us renew our commitment to make a real effort against AIDS. AIDS is a dramatic roadblock to development, especially for Africa. We need a global awakening. We need it on every development agenda. Leaders must talk about it; opinion makers must talk about it. Civil society must be mobilized. We need broad multisectoral action and new partnerships at the national and the global level. We must empower women and girls to make them less vulnerable. Education must be the leading tool. Change in the sexual behaviour of many men is key in turning the tide of the AIDS epidemic.

We need to make existing medicines available to all, not just the fortunate few. All too often, the diseases are in the South and the drugs are in the North. The poor should not have to pay the same price for essential drugs as the rich.

Let us make a real effort to empower women. Poverty has a striking gender bias. Seven out of ten of the extremely poor are women. In large parts of the world, women are denied political, economic and legal rights, rights that would help empower them to fight poverty. Combating poverty means investing in women: in the health of the girl child, in the education of the young and the political and economic rights of the woman. And it means focusing on the role and responsibility of men. Let us be frank; in too many countries, men do not take their fair share of the burden. Women's rights are far too often abused - by society and by men. We will not win the struggle against poverty unless this is changed, and men have to be part of the solution.

Let us make a real effort to invest in development. It is a national responsibility to chart the road to development. Poor countries must adopt policies for equity and fair distribution; too often, this is not the case. But at the same time, the rich countries cannot turn their back on development, and increased market access will make a real contribution.

Eradicating global poverty is everybody's business. There can be no excuse to the sharp decline in public spending for development. Rich countries have pledged to contribute 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product. My country maintains a contribution of 0.9 per cent, with the aim of raising it to 1 per cent. However, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average has dropped to close to 0.2 per cent.

There must be limits on the conditions donor countries place on their development cooperation. I regret that a few countries last week blocked the attempt by the OECD to end the practice of tying development aid to the purchase of goods and services from donor countries.

In conclusion, the social sector is the web of our societies. A strong and effective public sector is key for securing equity and fair distribution at the national

level. At the global level, this public role goes to the United Nations. We must strengthen multilateral efforts to help nations cooperate and coordinate policies, to support capacity-building, to continue building public-sector functions, and to trigger new partnerships with the private sector and civil society.

Five years after Copenhagen, we have the knowledge of what it will take to fight poverty. The time has come to put that knowledge into action.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Lawrence Gonzi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Social Policy of Malta.

Mr. Gonzi (Malta): Malta welcomes the convening of this special session of the General Assembly, especially because it provides us with the opportunity to review the process initiated in Copenhagen and to focus on those significant areas of economic and social policy that can make a difference for us all, and in particular those who still live in poverty.

In this respect, my delegation commends the work done during the preparatory process by the Commission for Social Development, on which Malta is honoured to serve, as well as by the Preparatory Committee, both of which are mandated by General Assembly resolutions.

The Copenhagen commitments are now five years old. In this brief span of time, we have witnessed changes that have had a dramatic effect on the social development of our individual societies. Today we are even more conscious of a globalization process that has made frontiers a concept of the past. The world has moved forward in its endeavour to chart new ground in technology, and, as a result, we have made strides forward in improving the quality of life of our citizens.

But as everyone knows, each innovation brings new challenges. Today we talk of a knowledge-based society, lifelong education, flex time and flexible working conditions. In so doing, we recognize the need to have an educational system that responds to the needs of a modern economy. Today we talk of the incredible progress made in medicine, but we also recognize the challenge posed to our welfare and social security systems as the result of an ageing population.

In a sense, therefore, five years for the Copenhagen commitments is truly a long time. It is precisely for this reason that the Government of Malta is asking itself a number of questions. First, have we achieved what we had hoped during the last decades of social welfare policies? To what extent are the current systems addressing the real needs of our people? How sensitive are these systems to new and emerging needs? How are we to have a sustainable social welfare system? And how will the economic development of our country continue to translate itself into real social development for all our citizens?

I am sure that many other societies are facing the same dilemmas and the same questions. In our case, the restructuring of this area has to be considered in the framework of the restructuring efforts being undertaken in view of both my country's bid for accession to the European Union and the challenges being posed by the globalization process.

Our efforts in Malta are based on the capacity-building model, which addresses in an integrated manner the development of legislation and policies, institutional development, human resources and community development. Our targets are effective and sustainable services that meet the real needs of the client and ensure the efficient use of all our resources. In brief, we are striving to make a paradigm shift, namely from a system that is focused on technical output based on assumed needs to one that develops the capacity to meet the real demand.

In this context, I consider it pertinent to point out that my Government's programme of action to follow up the World Summit for Social Development is based on a vision that places the human person and the family at the very centre of social development. It is guided by the following principles.

First, particular attention is being given, and must continue to be given, to the more vulnerable members of society; secondly, both social security and social welfare are being enhanced and developed, while the necessary steps are being taken to ensure their continued sustainability; thirdly, social services are being restructured to make them more person- and family-focused; fourthly, individuals are being encouraged to actively participate in helping themselves, and eventually others, in enhancing their social well-being; and fifthly, civil society is to be actively promoted through active support of the voluntary sector.

In translating these principles into concrete measures that promote the real social development of

all citizens, my Government has in past years enacted legislative measures to strengthen social security and ensure employment without discrimination, the equal status of women, and the provision of equal and universal opportunity and access to free education at all levels and to the whole range of health services.

More recently, we have enacted equal opportunities legislation to promote full citizenship for all persons with disabilities, while important legislative frameworks on occupational health and safety, children's rights and the promotion of the voluntary sector, as well as legislation to combat violence against women and to ensure equal opportunities for women and men are at a very advanced stage of development.

Drugs, social exclusion, new medical and psychological problems, materialism and extreme individualism are some of the other central problems facing all our societies. Societies must cater to the well-being of our youth, disabled persons, single-parent families and an ever-increasing percentage of elderly persons. These are issues that involve the whole of society and not just the State. They pose a real challenge precisely because they are rooted in our lifestyle and in our social structures. The engagement of political forces should therefore be intensified. The services given by the State ought to be constantly updated, professionalized and rendered more effective than they have been so far.

Solidarity and cooperation must remain the two main elements in translating our words into our deeds. We must build social safety nets to ensure that all citizens have access to what is necessary to address their basic needs. Though the main responsibility for the implementation rests with national Governments, the contribution of all other social partners in our societies and within the State cannot be minimized.

No society can ever rid itself of all social problems once and for all. Thinking otherwise is the easiest and most irresponsible way of ignoring them. Solutions are found only by looking at the individual problems in the light of an objective analysis of existing realities. Every form of social exclusion ought to be actively combated, both by improving economic opportunities on a general scale, as well as by means of direct interventions. The recent Lisbon conference highlighted what perhaps was obvious to most of us — that Europe's economic success is dependent on and intertwined with its unique social model. It is hard to say which is the cause and which is the effect, but we can safely say that Europe would not have reached its present state of security, peace and prosperity without balancing well these two facades of modern society.

The welfare system is one of the most distinctive features of European society and we must preserve its objectives of equity and equality of opportunities. However, we must also admit that even this well-developed system is no guarantee against poverty and that millions in Europe still live below the poverty line. If eradicating poverty in Europe and elsewhere is to continue to be our main target, we have to take a close look at the systems that are designed to provide a safety net for those who are truly in need. Therefore, reforming the welfare system should rank very high on the agenda of any nation that hopes to secure a basic quality of life for all its citizens.

Yet, such an approach cannot and should not be divorced from economic policy. In an era of globalization of our economies, Governments cannot fulfil their role by making their respective societies safe for capitalism without frontiers. Rather, all Governments, individually, collectively and through international forums, such as this special session of the General Assembly, are responsible for ensuring that capitalism is made safe for our societies, our communities, our families and our children. Corporate responsibility and corporate citizenship remain the responsibility of Government when the private sector alone fails to regulate itself.

In conclusion, to my Government, the way forward is one based on social justice, where the human person in most need is placed at the very centre of our national policies. Yet, no Government alone can achieve such objectives at the national level, let alone the international level. All societies represented in this conference shared the vision of the Copenhagen Declaration. We are here to recommit ourselves to this shared vision and to renew our determination to translate such vision into the social fabric of our communities. It is a vision that has as its ultimate aim the social development of our countries, the social well-being of our citizens and the making of societies in which everyone belongs.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Špidla, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Špidla (Czech Republic) (*spoke in French*): I am very pleased to represent the Czech Republic here on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration.

In the past five years, a new approach to public policy has evolved around the idea that true social integration and the well-being of the population are the most solid pillars of sustainable economic growth. This concept is shared by the European Union. Beyond Europe, however, it would be welcome if such bodies as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were to integrate it more systematically into their development strategies.

Why is social development a greater condition of economic development today than it was in the past? Undeniably, new technologies underlie a revolution in knowledge that imposes on us, the leaders of the States of this planet, the duty to promote the intellectual development of our peoples. In the past, this was aimed at improving the functioning of democracy; today, we also have economic motives. How, indeed, can we expect companies, forced by competition to increase their competitiveness, or our administrations, subject to the rules of quality, to succeed if all workers are not in a position to learn and to be trained?

As the French philosopher Simone Weil has shown, in order to do this, we must ensure that our citizens be as free as possible from social problems. Social malaise, poverty and exclusion are the ills that must be reduced by the State if the new intelligence revolution is to benefit all.

These principles are shared by European Governments. They are agreed by the large majority of populations, which are aware of the fact that market forces alone will not effectively ensure greater growth and optimal distribution. Borne along by this movement, the Czech Republic naturally joins in the strengthening of the social aspect of European construction, whose main priority is employment, which, as we know, is very effective both as a tool of integration and as a stimulus to knowledge.

This is why my Government, over a year ago, adopted a national employment plan, structured according to the four major chapters suggested by the European Council in Luxembourg: the improvement of employability, the development of the entrepreneurial spirit, the adaptability of employers and workers to market conditions and, finally, the strengthening of equal opportunities for men and women and combating all forms of discrimination.

Going beyond this very symbolic organization, the implementation of these objectives shows the nature of options available; these, too, are very European, whether we are speaking of the choice of active policies to combat exclusion, the implementation of integrated systems to prevent unemployment, or support for the development of job resources. I had the privilege of being the first representative of an associated country to sign, with Commissioner Diamantopoulou, the joint assessment of our employment policy. This was an indication of the resolute commitment of the Czech Republic to stand side by side with the European Union on these matters.

The design of our employment strategy has also been greatly influenced by the social partners. I am very happy to see this commitment, which goes well beyond simple advice. The social partners are, by definition, actors in the field who are inevitably involved in the effective implementation of public actions, in particular of those originating from the transposition of the "acquis communautaire". At the same time, I welcome the social partners' involvement in the tripartite type of structures. I believe that this is essential if we are to develop, in particular, the long-term social stability pact that my Government is advocating.

Within the framework of our employment policy, my Government has endeavoured to coordinate the actions to reduce inequalities that afflict certain groups of citizens. Physical or mental suffering — the consequences of war, disease or congenital deformities — in no way reduces the human value of its victims. The assessment of economic value is contrary to human rights when it comes to reducing physical or mental handicaps. This is why our ministers have coordinated a series of vigorous policies to ensure to the most vulnerable among us better access to employment and, when possible, improvement in their health, their social integration and their training.

Minorities, particular the Roma community, are another valuable resource to be cherished. Here again we have coordinated positive measures and legal guarantees, for example to reduce long-term unemployment which may afflict the members of these minorities. On each occasion, working with the representatives of the communities, we have been very

careful to ensure that social insertion is not carried out to the detriment of the individuals. Thus training is adapted so as to conserve the identity of each individual, while promoting the integration of citizens.

These, then, are some of our achievements. In reality, whether it is a matter of institutions, national life or activities in Europe and in the world, the Czech Republic, in the spirit of these times, is here advocating the advantages of social policies. If social policies are no longer marginal, and if they have direct bearing on the results of our economic activities, then a great hope springs up, for our old dreams of seeing our fellow citizens living in peace and prosperity have acquired concrete realities that were previously lacking. Now, the real world, the economy and competition require intelligence and knowledge, and intelligence and knowledge presuppose well-being and social inclusion. According to the phrase of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, we want a "globalization of social development".

However diverse our ideas and interests may be, we are championing social development. Since the Copenhagen Declaration, the words we used there have taken concrete forms. Thus I am convinced that this Declaration remains valid, and I hope that we will persist on the path it has outlined.

The challenge remains: the commitments of yesterday and today must become the actions of tomorrow.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency, the Honourable Ram Chandra Paudel, Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal.

Mr. Paudel (Nepal): Five years ago we made commitments through the Copenhagen Declaration. As we review the achievements since then, we find the world facing paradoxes. On the one hand, it has made unprecedented achievements in science and technology, with the full capacity to do away with human suffering. Yet, the world is also facing an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. Humankind has acquired enough capacity to comfortably feed itself, yet it has the largest number of people going to bed on an empty stomach.

Beginning with the United Nations Charter, the number and coverage of commitments to defend human rights and to do away with human miseries have reached a record high. So have the number of unfulfilled promises. Questions are being raised with regard to the share of the real poor in whatever the donors have allocated to them or in their name. In essence, what is asked for is transparency. Together with transparency, it is equally important to rethink the prescription of a fixed policy package, irrespective of different realities on the ground.

In my view, this inconsistency could be removed through the adoption of the following development-cooperation principles: real democracies do produce plural policy packages; each country situation is unique; the package must be consistent with the country's needs and priorities; and the purpose of cooperation is to respond to recipients' needs and priorities in the interest of safeguarding humanity and international social justice. I appeal for the protection of peoples' rights of policy choice. I believe that people have the right to learn from their mistakes. Above all, we also need to create opportunities for policy ingenuity and creativity at the individual country level.

The development needs of the developing world, especially of the least-developed countries, are many. To catch up, they need a much higher level of assistance. It is important to meet the commitment to provide 0.7 per cent of the industrialized countries' gross domestic product as official development assistance. We must also improve the efficiency and efficacy of assistance and its utilization. It is high time we ensured transparency at all levels and on all sides, nationally and internationally. It is also time to allocate at least 20 per cent of official development assistance to basic social sectors.

Considering the severity of the debt burden on the least developed countries and the much-needed resources that are flowing out of those countries in the form of debt repayments, the international community should expand the scope of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative to cover total debt relief for all least developed countries. The available resources could be utilized for basic social services and poverty alleviation. To ensure freedom, social justice, solidarity and global peace, I see the need to review the current international cooperation arrangements.

At the national level, poverty alleviation is Nepal's topmost policy priority. We are trying to achieve sustainable development through utilization of locally available resources for agriculture, forestry,

tourism and water resources development. We have taken a number of initiatives in social development and social inclusion. Highest priority has been accorded to the development of rural areas, where the incidence of poverty and ignorance is most serious. A local self-governance act empowers local people in the decision-making process. Legal arrangements to safeguard women's representation and participation in the decision-making process, even at the grass-roots level, have also been put in place.

An environment is being created to resettle and emancipate landless people and bonded labourers. Institutional reform is under way, as is the implementation of a special programme for indigenous people, downtrodden persons and oppressed communities. The development of remote areas is also taking place. Programmes like Special Area Development, Bishweshwor with the Poor, and Women Awareness are some of the target-based programmes specially designed to enhance the social and economic conditions of the poorest of the poor. To expedite poverty programmes, a poverty alleviation fund has been created recently, and the poverty reduction strategy is aimed at implementing various programmes through local bodies and civil society, including community based organizations working through the social mobilization efforts of non-governmental organizations.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal promulgated after the historic political transformation of 1990 guarantees fundamental human rights. The commitment of His Majesty's Government of Nepal to promote and protect human rights is demonstrated in the various legislative, judicial and administrative measures taken since the restoration of democracy. A national human rights commission has been constituted. Nepal has also ratified several international conventions, covenants and protocols. Of course, the change in the political system is accompanied by both opportunities and challenges. The opportunities inherent in a democratic system are clearly characterized by transparency in the political process and the ultimate accountability of those in positions of political leadership to the people.

On the other hand, the challenges for a small, landlocked least developed country like Nepal are manifested most strikingly in the lack of human, material and technical resources needed to be able to adequately address the growing needs and expectations of the people. In that sense, the widespread poverty, the absence of physical and institutional infrastructure and the inability to provide at least a minimal social safety net for the most vulnerable groups in society continue to pose the biggest challenges. The generation of gainful employment for our increasingly literate and educated young people is another major challenge.

Our experience shows that beginning any social development efforts becomes an expensive and unsustainable efforts in the absence of basic infrastructural facilities. Therefore, we cannot afford to relax our efforts to create and expand them. So, to initiate and sustain social development, I urge this body to consider the allocation of adequate resources to develop basic physical infrastructure, especially the transport and communications networks, as an additional item of explicit and long-term commitment.

We believe our development depends on good governance and the honest implementation of the above initiatives. In this context, we have undertaken a number of initiatives, including the downsizing of the Government and the implementation of a drastic civil service reform. As we undertake these programmes in earnest, we find ourselves facing a paradox of a different type. No sooner have we liberated ourselves from the tyranny of autocracy than people in some parts of our country find themselves forced to live lives of fear and agony. As we are fighting for freedom from hunger, we once again find ourselves fighting for freedom from fear.

As if that were not enough, we are saddled with the heavy burden of over 100,000 refugees from our neighbouring country, Bhutan. This pressure is casting its shadow over our social, economic and national environment.

To conclude, the Social Summit initiated a turn in the tide of political opinion. We agreed on a more balanced development policy based on growth with equity, moving away from narrow preoccupation with market liberalization. Our mission is to change the course of history as we enter the new millennium. For this, the well-being of the people and society must be the goal of our polity, with economic strategy serving only as a means. So let us recognize that social development without social justice is not possible. Democracy will also be threatened in the absence of social justice. Nor can sustained social development and justice take place in an undemocratic set-up.

nationally or internationally. To ensure social justice nationally and internationally, a major reorientation in international cooperation — including the international flow of both products and human capital — is necessary. Let us solemnly pledge to do that. Let this be our commitment as we meet at the dawn of a new millennium at this special session of the General Assembly in Geneva.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Irena Degutiene, Minister for Social Affairs of Lithuania.

Ms. Degutiene (Lithuania): On behalf of the President of the Republic of Lithuania and of the Prime Minister, I would like to congratulate the representatives at this special session of the General Assembly and wish all of us success in further advancing the social agenda. I am glad to have the opportunity to represent my country and to express our opinion on the influence of the Copenhagen process in Lithuania.

The United Nations Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in March 1995, reminded the world of the importance of social development and combating poverty and social exclusion for the progress of democracy and the development of a stable society. This special session of the General Assembly on social issues is a very useful event. It will allow us to review and appraise the implementation of outcomes of the Copenhagen Summit and also to decide on further initiatives in order to strengthen the effectiveness of their implementation.

In line with the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration, the President of the Republic of Lithuania established an inter-institutional Social Committee to present a report on the implementation of the Declaration and to prepare for the first Lithuanian poverty reduction strategy. The national report was prepared in 1999 and presented to the United Nations. This document, covering the achievements of Lithuania after the Copenhagen Summit, was a significant step towards the development of a comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy. It showed that in recent years social protection expenditure in Lithuania has been growing, while relative poverty has had a tendency to decrease.

The national report also points out that in Lithuania the most immediate social challenges include the developing of the well-being of the rural population, supporting large families and integrating socially vulnerable population groups into society.

The draft strategy was presented by the President of the Republic of Lithuania to all political parties, a large number of non-governmental organizations and the general public. Their comments were taken into account.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Lithuania, which supported us during all stages of the strategy preparation. We were also pleased to discuss poverty issues and ways to combat poverty with our colleagues from Latvia and Estonia during the Baltic Conference on Poverty Reduction that took place recently. The strategy is in line with the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which identifies the fulfilment of people's needs and goals as the main objective of the development of society. This means that economic growth must be socially, politically and economically related with the improvement of the welfare of all citizens.

The strategy defines the concept of poverty adapted to the Lithuanian situation, indicates the way to measure it, gives an overview of the spread of poverty and identifies the most impoverished groups of the population. Based on this information, strategic targets for poverty reduction have been identified: the reduction of overall poverty levels and the provision of assistance to the most vulnerable groups.

The poverty reduction strategy is based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. In particular, the strategy underlines the role of non-governmental organizations and social partners in dealing with the poverty issue. The main objective is to increase employment and create favourable conditions for members of society to acquire an appropriate education and to start up and develop businesses.

Employment promotion is considered to be a very effective method for reducing poverty. Lithuania prepared a National Employment Action Plan to strengthen employment for the year 2000-2002, which sets out measures for developing employment and social cohesion by using local initiatives and other active labour market measures. Social enterprises will be established for people with little professional education, inactive people and people faced with social

problems. In these enterprises, social rehabilitation and personality development will be as important as work, since the purpose is not only to create jobs but also to favour reintegration into society.

Ensuring gender equality in the labour market is also one of the main objectives of the National Employment Action Plan. Moreover, the Government is taking active steps to achieve gender equality and eliminate women's poverty, and particular attention is being paid to the plans of Beijing + 5.

One of the preconditions for successful poverty reduction is the improvement of the social assistance system. It is oriented towards paying benefits in a more targeted manner and guaranteeing a more rationalized benefits system, as well as developing social services. It is necessary to ensure that services are available to every person and to create conditions so that people affected by poverty can take care of themselves and become integrated into society.

Concrete measures for poverty reduction foreseen in the strategy are implemented mainly at the municipal level. Non-governmental organizations, volunteers and informal service providers are also involved in this process. In the meantime, we are looking for effective forms of cooperation between municipalities and non-governmental organizations.

A commission for the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy is to be established. It will be reporting to the President of the Republic of Lithuania. The commission will monitor the poverty situation and analyse the efficiency of measures intended to combat it. An annual report on poverty in Lithuania is to be published in order to evaluate poverty and suggest measures for its reduction.

I would like to assure the General Assembly that Lithuania is involved in the Copenhagen process and that combating poverty and strengthening social cohesion are high priorities in our country. I hope that the Geneva session will have a positive impact on efforts to solve this very serious problem affecting humanity.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Ann Thérèse Ndong-Jatta, Secretary of State for Education of the Gambia.

Ms. Ndong-Jatta (Gambia): I would like to seize this opportunity first of all to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your election as President of this special session, as well as on the able manner in which you have been presiding over our deliberations, which, I have no doubt, will lead to a successful outcome. On behalf of the President, the people and the delegation of the Gambia, I also wish to thank our host, the Government of Switzerland, for the excellent arrangements put in place for this special session.

The Gambia associates itself with the statement of the Chairperson of the Group of 77 and China.

Five years ago, we met in Copenhagen and committed ourselves globally, and at the highest political level, to eradicating poverty, enhancing employment and promoting social integration. This commitment was encapsulated in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Second Republic of the Gambia, in full recognition of its responsibility in terms of implementation of the Programme of Action, put in place a programme of rectification that created an environment conducive to social development. It infused dynamism into the Vision 2020 initiative. An all-encompassing initiative, our country's version of the Vision 2020 comprises a forward-looking strategy that places emphasis on, among other things, guaranteeing a decent standard of living for all our people. Also, a comprehensive National Poverty Alleviation Programme is the focal point for poverty alleviation. In the recent past, an institutional coordinating mechanism was put in place for the mainstreaming of gender and poverty concerns.

During this special session, as we embark on a five-year review of the implementation of the agreements made at the historic World Summit for Social Development, my delegation reaffirms our national commitment and pledge to redouble our efforts to deliver on the unwavering commitment made five years ago in Copenhagen. In our contribution to the debate during this very important special session, we will therefore focus on some of the issues that we have identified as needing particular attention.

Over and above the various strategies that have been put in place to implement the commitments in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, a look back will reveal that, while some progress may have been made, the hurdles that remain in the path of social development are overwhelming. Thus, while five years may not seem to be a long time, this special session, taking place at the threshold of the new

millennium, is an important watershed in the history of human development. Indeed, it accords us the opportunity to reassess and re-evaluate our past concerted efforts to make the world a better place for the global community. It is also an opportune time to look ahead, within the context of our reaffirmation of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, and to pledge to take further actions to implement the commitment made at the World Summit for Social Development.

The outcome document that comes to us from the preparatory process preceding this special session, after long hours of intense and extensive negotiations, is, but for some areas of regrettable disagreement arising from some irreconcilable fundamental differences, a useful guide in our continuing efforts to implement the Programme of Action. The challenges that have always faced us remain daunting. To a certain extent, their resolution has become more urgent since Copenhagen. Some of these challenges, to mention a few, are the debt burden, armed conflict and the political and economic empowerment of women.

The link of cause and effect between the debt burden and slow rate of development and, by extension, poverty, cannot be overemphasized. Despite repeated appeals for a lasting solution, the debt crisis remains a critical factor for developing countries. As we have always done, we once again appeal for cancellation or conversion of the debt stock of the least developed countries, targeting especially education, health and agricultural provisions for the general population. This would set the tone for a concerted international effort for the eradication of poverty and quality education and health for all.

With regard to the second issue, that of armed conflict, it cannot be gainsaid that it diverts the human, natural and financial resources that are needed for social development. There are armed conflicts the world over, but we can say without fear of contradiction that more than any other part of the world, the African continent is a case of severe development derailment, where stagnant development and civil unrest are the norm rather than the exception. In a bid to resolve conflicts, insufficient attention is paid, alas, to the underlying causes of conflict.

In this regard, we recall the Secretary-General's 1998 report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, in which a most interesting analysis of the root causes of conflicts on the continent is made. A number of resolutions have since been adopted in reaction to some of the issues raised in that report. Unfortunately, it is the same old story about the problem of implementation. We must not let the momentum of such laudable initiatives falter, and we must reaffirm our commitment to minimize armed conflict through concerted efforts, at the national, subregional, regional and international levels, to address the diverse and complex problems that lead to armed conflicts, particularly in Africa.

As for the last issue that concerns us, it is only in recent years that the significant role women play and could play in social development has been accorded international recognition. This recognition was fully acknowledged by the convening in Beijing in 1995 of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Since Beijing, efforts have been made to include women in the decision-making process. In the Gambia, for example, we have since witnessed a significant increase in the number of women permanent secretaries and department directors, and the number of women Cabinet Ministers has risen to three, including the Vice-President, who is also responsible for women's affairs. The Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly is also a woman.

However, in a bid to attain gender equality and equity worldwide, adequate resources must be provided for translation of the various commitments and resolutions into concrete actions; we must mainstream gender in all policies and programmes; and we must exercise the political will and commitment that is a prerequisite to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Finally, as reaffirmed by Governments at the recently concluded "Women 2000" special session held in New York, we must increase access and retention for girls in education; and we must make microcredit and other financial schemes accessible to women. Without concrete actions such as those enumerated, the political and economic empowerment of women to ensure their full participation in national development will continue to elude us, and the world will continue to be deprived of the input of a significant percentage of its workforce.

May I conclude by underlining the fact that the world is sufficiently sensitized, but perhaps not sufficiently convinced, to translate words into action. To act now, and fast, is the only firm assurance we can

give the citizens of the universe of our commitment to social justice and development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Andreas Moushoutas, Minister of Labour and Social Insurance of Cyprus.

Mr. Moushoutas (Cyprus): It is an honour for my country, Cyprus, and for me to be participating in this special session of the General Assembly. I wish to convey the cordial greetings of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Glafcos Clerides, to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the excellent preparatory work and to thank most sincerely the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee and all the working groups for their hard work.

The Government of Cyprus has aligned itself with the statement made yesterday on behalf of the European Union. I would like, however, to say a few things in addition.

Speaking at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen, I stressed the importance of social development and social justice for the achievement and maintenance of peace and security within and among nations, and I endorsed the need for the creation of a framework of action which places people at the centre of development and directs our economies to meet human needs more effectively. This statement still holds good today.

The review and appraisal of the outcome of the Summit has shown that, with a view to implementing the Copenhagen Commitments, many new policies and programmes have been initiated at the national level, while international organizations have refocused their activities. However, much remains to be done in view of increased globalization, especially since it has been clearly shown that the national and international policy responses have been uneven.

My delegation wishes to join forces with other United Nations Member States, international organizations and other interested agents in making the results of our deliberations during this week represent a significant step further in achieving the goals agreed at the Summit, for the developments in the years which have elapsed since then fully confirm the validity of these goals and the need for new initiatives and innovative approaches.

Like others, we recognize the need to anticipate and offset the negative and potentially negative social and economic consequences resulting from the globalization process and to maximize its benefits for all members of society, including those with special needs. In this connection, my Government wishes to stress the importance it attaches to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on fundamental labour rights and to the promotion of the goal of full and productive employment. Decent work is indeed the cornerstone in preventing and alleviating poverty and achieving greater social cohesion.

It is for this reason that the promotion of full and productive employment, as advocated in ILO Convention 122, has been a standing goal of the social policy of the Government of Cyprus since the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960.

Investing in education and human development, improving the functioning of the labour market, promoting gender equality and non-discrimination in employment and working conditions and protecting, through special measures, the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, remain high priorities for my Government and the social partners.

The document (A/S-24/2/Add.2(Part III)) entitled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the commitments made at the Summit" contains many good proposals, the adoption of which will certainly take forward the social development agenda. Time constraints do not allow me to comment on these. Without underestimating the significance of any of these proposals, I would like in this short address to single out in particular the importance of the proposal which recommends the establishment of an expert working group to develop guidelines on sound principles and good practices in social policy to promote the three goals of the Summit. We believe that this proposal can be of great practical value to Governments and to international organizations.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Swiss Government for its *philoxenia* and by expressing the conviction that the efforts invested in this special session, as well as its outcome, will prove worthwhile.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Edward Lowassa, Minister of State, Office of the Vice-President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Lowassa (United Republic of Tanzania): Allow me, on behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, to express our sincere gratitude

to the people and the Government of Switzerland for playing the perfect host and for the excellent arrangements made for the Summit. Mr. President, I also take this opportunity to congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on your election to steer the work of this meeting. My delegation is confident that under your wise guidance our deliberations will be crowned with great success.

We are gathered here today to take stock of experiences gained in the course of implementing the Copenhagen Programme of Action, endorsed during the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. For us in Tanzania, the Copenhagen Programme of Action has acted as a tonic to rekindle and rejuvenate previous initiatives in the area of social development and social integration in our development endeavours.

Despite the existence of formidable challenges, Tanzania has recorded significant achievements in the area of social transformation and development since 1995. Over the years, the Government has taken measures to create an enabling environment for economic and social development by ensuring access, as a matter of rights, to equity and equality of social and economic opportunities while broadly expanding participation in the decision-making process. Similarly, action has been taken towards enhancing gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination against the disadvantaged groups in our society. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the adoption of macroeconomic and sector policies as well as the restructuring of public sector institutions is already having a positive impact on the provision of services, enhancement of economic growth and creation of employment opportunities.

The Government of Tanzania has identified a number of priority areas for intervention in addressing poverty. These include strengthening basic education, especially of the girl child, increasing transparency and promoting consultative forums for the exchange of ideas among all stakeholders. Furthermore, a number of measures have been taken to address poverty and related issues. These include mandating the Vice-President's Office with the overall coordination of poverty eradication initiatives and adopting a multidimensional national poverty eradication strategy. This strategy has targeted the years 2015 for reducing abject poverty by half and 2025 for total poverty eradication.

The major advantages that Tanzania has in its fight against poverty include the peace and tranquillity that the country continues to enjoy. Nevertheless, Tanzania is learning through bitter experience that insecurity in the countries of the Great Lakes region is greatly undermining its internal security. Tanzania is home to refugees from civil strife in warring neighbouring states. While protection for human rights for the refugees is essential, as stipulated in United Nations conventions, the persistent influx of refugees into the country is a threat to peace, the environment and social development in the receiving regions of the country. It is therefore imperative for the international community to work for peace in these States and to participate in rehabilitating social services, the economic infrastructure and the environment as a way of consolidating peace in areas of conflict and assisting poor refugee-hosting States.

Although Tanzania has scored some achievements towards the implementation of the Social Summit goals, a number of obstacles have impeded the pace of our efforts and even resulted in a certain inertia. First, in the course of implementing poverty-reduction measures, Tanzania, like other less developed countries, is constrained by the debt-servicing burden, which reduces our ability to allocate more resources to social development. On the average, since 1995, the Government has been spending each year about 40 per cent of its domestic revenue on servicing debts.

As we have repeatedly stated in many other international forums, the debt problems facing the least developed countries require urgent solutions. While we appreciate the measures taken so far, we note with regret that these measures have not proved to redress adequately this devastating handicap. Taking into account the international consensus that extra measures are urgently needed to assist the developing countries to extricate themselves from the debt trap, it is our expectation that this summit will make a firm commitment in response to the request, made by many of the delegations that spoke before me, for the cancellation of both the bilateral and multilateral debts of highly indebted poor countries.

Secondly, there is the problem of inadequate domestic resources, coupled with the decline in resource flows from our collaborating and development partners.

The implementation of the reform agenda and the deliberate policy of the Government to eradicate poverty have resulted in increased resources being allocated to social sectors. The share of budgetary resources allocated to the social sectors has been increasing gradually, from less than 20 per cent in 1995 to 25 per cent in 1999. Nevertheless, we are in a situation in which more is not enough. For a successful implementation of our reform agenda, greater collaboration with our development partners is essential.

In the present environment of an increasingly globalized world economy, no country is isolated from the other, and the impact of development in one part of the world is felt all over. It is therefore essential that national efforts be supplemented through international cooperation. The need is for new and additional resources flowing from the developed countries to assist others. The creation of a just, equitable and non-discriminatory international economic environment that is conducive to social development and sensitive to the needs of the poor is urgently required.

Since the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a number of setbacks have accrued through the weakening and reduction of the much-needed labour force. By December 1998, Tanzania was estimated to have 1.6 million people infected by HIV, and the epidemic was spreading steadily throughout the country. As the spread of the disease gains momentum, we are realizing that as a country we need to do more to fight it. The international community also needs to redouble its efforts in the control of the epidemic.

These existing limitations do not in any manner alter our commitment to the Copenhagen Programme of Action. In this regard, Tanzania will continue to promote the public and private sector partnership for sustainable programming and development, and to restructure public service institutions for enhanced efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, Tanzania will continue taking stepped-up measures towards poverty eradication.

Before I conclude my statement, may I make an observation: world social development is in crisis. The crisis is more severe in the developing countries, in which past gains in social development are at risk of being eroded and reversed. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider. This summit should bear in mind the fact that we are all in the same boat, and that we therefore have a common destiny. It is impossible, in the long run, to maintain high levels of social development in one region while widespread and deepening poverty and human degradation prevail in others.

It is our expectation — and it is a high one — that the results of this summit will rekindle the collective commitment made in 1995 and provide the means to effectively support the further implementation of the Programme of Action with clear objectives, strategies and targets.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Maija Perho, Minister for Social Affairs and Health of Finland.

Ms. Perho (Finland): Let me start by congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of this very important special session. Finland fully aligns itself with the statement made by the Minister of Social and Labour Affairs of Portugal, Mr. Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues, on behalf of the European Union.

This week we will again raise deliberations on social development to a high political level. I am convinced that the achievements registered five years ago in Copenhagen will not only be amplified but also augmented and strengthened here in Geneva.

I would like to make a few remarks on the issues that are of particular interest to Finland. These issues are universality and equal opportunity; gender; human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights; health and education; and the financing of social development. All of these issues are cornerstones of social development and are increasingly recognized as such for economic development as well. The dimensions of sustainable development — social and economic development and environmental protection — are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. I would like to emphasize that sustainable social development in particular is a prerequisite for development and well-being.

In Copenhagen, heads of State and Government acknowledged the urgent need to address the profound social problems, especially poverty, unemployment and social exclusion, that affect every country. In view of the rapidly progressing globalization, their call is even more timely today. Globalization is a process that is generating a growing interdependence in today's world.

Globalization comprising both challenges and opportunities can also lead to increased vulnerability and, in the worst case, to increased marginalization. The challenge we are facing is to make the process beneficial to all.

Finland is fully committed to the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments. This applies to both domestic and international policies, including development cooperation. The aim is to create a continuously developing society that will guarantee everyone an opportunity for meaningful work, independent living and active participation in the community and the whole of society. Our focus in increasing social integration and reducing poverty is to ensure that all people have access to basic social services and that additional, especially targeted social services are available to the groups with special needs. In achieving a society for all, it is our experience that it may not be enough to assist people in need with the specially targeted measures.

During the Copenhagen +5 preparatory process, it was widely agreed that the essential elements in creating an enabling environment for social development are full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, good governance and equality between men and women. The responsibility for enforcing these rights and principles rests with national Governments.

The Governments also have the main responsibility for ensuring the availability of and universal access to basic social and health services. These services can be provided by public and private sectors and supplemented by third parties, such as non-governmental organizations and voluntary work. In order to provide more resources for those services, and therefore also for broader poverty eradication objectives, Finland encourages the Governments of developed and developing countries to give thorough consideration to the implementation of the 20/20 initiative.

The international community, especially the United Nations system, should strengthen its support to the Governments of developing countries, as well as to countries with economies in transition, in their efforts to implement the Copenhagen commitments. The financing for the development process will, hopefully, provide political impetus and mobilize resources not only for social development, but also for the fully integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcome of the major United Nations conferences and summits.

A high level of economic inclusion will be an essential element of maintaining social cohesion while responding to the challenges of globalization and phasing in a knowledge-based society. In particular, with the spread of information-technology-intensive production, the risk of the marginalization of ageing and unskilled labour has grown. Modern information and communication technologies should be available to all. The potential of these technologies must be exploited in order to broaden the reach of basic education, particularly in the direction of the excluded and underprivileged groups.

Improvements in economic performance and labour market outcomes make it possible to restore full employment as a basic priority in economic and social policies. Respect for and the promotion and realization of the principles contained in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its follow-up are also essential in this context. We cannot stress enough the overwhelming weight of the evidence we have today of the profitability of investing in the social sector. Long-term investment in health, education and other basic social services produces better socio-economic results than any other investment. It increases economic productivity, which helps to achieve full employment, eradicate poverty and promote social well-being.

Mr. Jonsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

As a woman and mother, I want to stress that women and girls should be specially taken into account in guaranteeing universal access to quality basic education as well as to quality primary health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health services and family planning.

Another issue of importance to my delegation is the further development of internationally approved principles and good practices in social policy, as was proposed in the initiative of the World Bank in April 1999. Taking into consideration the central role of the United Nations in establishing principles, standards and norms, the countries present here should also give their full support to the United Nations by taking the lead in this effort.

Finally, I would like to reiterate one important message of the Copenhagen Summit. People-centred social development should also be seen in the context of security. Poverty, social disintegration, unemployment, demographic pressures, epidemics — especially HIV/AIDS — and mass migrations are modern threats to security. Therefore, investments in social development are also investments in the very basic elements of modern societies: stability, security and peace.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Anastasios Giannitsis, Minister of Employment and Social Services of Greece.

Mr. Giannitsis (Greece): It is a great honour for me to take the floor at this special session of the General Assembly and I would like to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election as President of the Assembly at this summit. I wish to assure him of my delegation's full support and cooperation towards the successful conclusion of this very important meeting.

Five years ago at the Copenhagen Summit, we reached a consensus to place people at the centre of our national policies regarding poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. On behalf of my Government, I would like today to reaffirm Greece's commitment to the goals and objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. Furthermore, we like many others also came here to identify new challenges and trends. More importantly, we gathered here to agree upon further actions and initiatives and to ensure that further commitments for social development will be made and implemented.

The experience of all these years has showed that social development is not a linear evolution. Progress on some issues is often accompanied by backwardness in other areas; such contrasting phenomena are observed both within societies and among countries.

In the new globalized international context, social developments and new technologies create new inequalities over and above older ones. For example, poverty, unemployment, immigration, violence, the exploitation of women and children, and unbalanced and often unfair conditions in the workplace are taking new forms and have become sources of concern for many countries.

As we enter the twenty-first century it becomes more and more apparent that a new economic and social reality is emerging — a reality to which our policy objectives and instruments have to be adapted. In particular, the effectiveness of policy interventions is increasingly associated with more targeted and selective approaches concerning the social implications of unemployment, technical change and globalization.

Turning specifically to my country, Greece, let me highlight some major features of the last years, features that have had a clear impact on social development.

First, despite the fact that during these years we implemented a very strict stabilization program, our policy mix always included a distinct social agenda. Social expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product slightly increased during recent years. This combination had a favourable impact on the success of our macroeconomic policy.

Secondly, one important goal of our policy agenda was to complement restructuring, privatization and, in general, structural policies with interventions involving a balanced distribution of costs and benefits among stakeholders. Besides its social effects, this facilitated the process of restructuring and its positive effects on growth. And finally, it contributed to the enhancement of the financial basis of our social policy itself. Social dialogue and participation mechanisms were an important element of our policies.

Thirdly, during the 1990s Greece was one of the countries that experienced a significant influx of economic refugees, mostly from neighbouring countries. Among the countries of the European Union, Greece has one of the highest percentages of immigrants to total population. This is a de facto, yet significant contribution to the social as well as the economic stabilization of the region.

The recent acceptance of Greece into the euro zone is a milestone not only for our economic policies but for our social policies as well.

Our social agenda in this new era has six main axes. The first is to fight the roots of social exclusion, deep social inequalities and poverty, which are not only of an economic but also of a social and political nature. The second, more specific, priority concerns policies to reduce unemployment, which we currently consider to be the most significant source of social problems. Policies facilitating the diffusion of new knowledge and providing technological infrastructure to the young

generation, and in particular to unemployed persons, are on the top of our agenda for the years to come.

The third priority is to sustain a safety net against social exclusion, especially for people with limited capabilities to respond to the changing environment. The fourth is to improve the institutional framework concerning gender issues and minorities.

Our fifth priority is to transform our social security system. It is a political obligation to reduce the risks of a growing social deficit resulting from the problems of the pension system. It is important to create a viable system, ensuring employees stability and confidence about their future. Otherwise, inequalities, poverty and exclusion will gradually emerge and will create new pressures on our societies.

Finally, the shift to the so-called new economy requires the implementation of a compensatory mechanism to facilitate adaptation and social consensus. We believe that social inclusion and social stability in the new economy are closely associated with policies aiming at widely spreading the benefits of development within our societies. Access to basic social goals and services needs to be a permanent concern of our policies.

Greece, as a member State of the European Union and a founding Member of the United Nations and other international organizations, supports the full implementation of declarations and international conventions for human rights. I also associate myself fully with the statement made by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union yesterday.

It is absolutely imperative that we safeguard the principles of Copenhagen, that we renew our firm commitment to them and that particular emphasis is put on the implementation of the Programme of Action. At the same time, in view of the challenges that confront humanity in the new millennium, it is also essential to attain these goals in a spirit of constructive cooperation and of mutual respect for and understanding of each other's specific needs and interests. In this very spirit, it is our fervent wish and hope that the final documents of this milestone event will be the product of general agreement and that they will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Célestin Kabanda, Secretary of State, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning of Rwanda.

Mr. Kabanda (Rwanda) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Government and people of Rwanda, allow me to express our warmest greetings to the President. I would also like, on behalf of the delegation of Rwanda, to express our gratitude to the Government and people of Switzerland for the generous hospitality they have offered us.

Allow me as well to express my congratulations to the United Nations for having organized this World Summit on Social Development in Geneva. Such a meeting, following up on the Copenhagen Summit, represents a valuable opportunity for exchanging ideas that make possible a common and consistent vision of what is at stake and of the opportunities to promote social well-being.

The experience of the three past decades shows that the development strategies adopted by the majority of African countries have not have the impact expected as far as social development is concerned. As regards internal factors, this poor performance is explained principally by inadequate macroeconomic and debt policies, prolonged conflicts and poor management of public assets. As regards external factors, the fixing of commodity prices by the industrialized countries has not allowed the developing countries to benefit from commercial exchanges, thus provoking a perpetual imbalance of payments and ever greater recourse to external debt.

In spite of the introduction of structural adjustment programmes aimed at correcting the errors of the past, strengthening human and institutional capacities and promoting good governance, we must note that these programmes have not made it possible to bring about significant economic growth. Women, children and the poor in general are still the most affected by poverty, which remains quite widespread in Africa. On top of this there is the burden of the external debt, the repayment of which consumes the majority of the budgets — which ought to be invested in social actions. The cancelling of this debt would enable poor countries to allocate more financial resources to social actions, most particularly to those that target the most disadvantaged sections of the population.

Many African countries, most particularly those of the Great Lakes region, are making an effort to face the challenge of socio-economic development. However, at present the conflicts between the peoples

of this region are a major obstacle that must be removed in order to bring about these countries' development. The United Nations Security Council should strengthen its presence in those countries in accordance with the firm commitments it has undertaken.

For countries that have undergone prolonged wars — in particular Rwanda, which underwent the genocide of 1994 — the strategy for creating prosperity for their people, and especially reducing poverty, should take into account the search for solutions to conflicts, removing structural problems and taking actions to quickly alleviate the consequences of the genocide.

The genocide undergone by Rwanda in 1994 deeply weakened the socio-economic fabric and cohesion at the national level. From the social point of view, the genocide worsened the level of poverty, which went from 53 per cent in 1993 to over 70 per cent in 1996. In addition to the exorbitant number of persons living under the poverty line, there are also vulnerable groups of widows, victims of the genocide and orphans as heads of households.

In the face of these problems, the Government of the National Unity of Rwanda, in cooperation with its development partners, has undertaken important measures aimed at re-establishing unity and national reconciliation in order to bring about good governance and a rule of law able to promote the well-being of the entire population in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Indeed, after the 1994 genocide the balance sheet of the actions undertaken is currently satisfactory. Among those actions we may cite the rehabilitation of the judicial system and the establishment of new institutions — including the "gacaca" courts which promote participatory justice — the launching of a process to decentralize and democratize administrative structures, the establishment of a national human rights commission and the Commission for Unity and National Reconciliation, and the promulgation of a law aimed at empowering women — which is mainly intended to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and which also aims at establishing committees that bring together women representatives from the local administration level to the national. Currently, women are represented at all levels, including the National Assembly. The Government has also set up communal funds aimed at women's empowerment and entrepreneurship through, among other things, the granting of microcredit to women in rural areas.

Even though the results achieved during 1995-2000 are satisfactory, Rwanda still faces major problems in social development. Life expectancy at birth is 49 years, whereas in 1990 it was 53 years. This sharp drop in life expectancy is partially due to the increase of HIV/AIDS. The infection rate grew from 5 per cent in 1990 to 11 per cent today.

Faced with this situation, the Government of National Union has prepared its development vision to cover the period from the present to 2020 and has also established structures to formulate and follow up strategies aimed at poverty reduction. In addition to measures to increase income and access to health care, drinking water and education by disadvantaged populations, the development vision of a poor country like Rwanda, which does not have significant natural resources, is also based on other alternative methods such as developing human resources and new skills.

The Government of Rwanda attaches great importance to international, regional and bilateral cooperation. The social development objectives set out by the State, and in particular those relating to poverty reduction, can only be brought only about by effective collaboration with international partners acting in the productive and social sectors. That collaboration with the international community will be accompanied by the integration of our country into the market economy.

I would not like to end my statement without reiterating my congratulations to the organizers of this session and to the international community in general for the efforts undertaken in the area of development, especially in the framework of strengthening cooperation and solidarity among peoples throughout the world to make development ever more effective and to build a better world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Smaranda Dobrescu, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Romania.

Mrs. Dobrescu (Romania) (*spoke in French*): This special session of the United Nations General Assembly offers us an opportunity to review the achievements made since the holding of the World Summit for Social Development and to identify appropriate ways to combat poverty and thereby

promote respect for human dignity. This is a difficult task, but it is a just and noble one.

Romania associates itself with the statement made by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union on behalf of its members and associated countries.

I would like to emphasize certain aspects that are of importance to my country.

Contrary to the expectations of its population, the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic system based on the market economy is taking place during a profound economic crisis that has been accompanied by a marked reduction in living standards. Presently, real income has decreased by over 40 per cent since 1989. Poverty has become one of the most serious social problems for Romanian society, and combating its is a priority of its economic and social policy. Although it was not initially the object of systematic or coherent policies, the protection against poverty has become an absolute need for the authorities and has influenced to a certain extent the design and pace of reform.

In order to prevent further poverty, measures for social protection have been adopted. Those include a guaranteed minimum wage, the establishment of a protection system for the unemployed and the extension of benefits periods, the establishment of social assistance for families with children, an increase in social benefits, and the development of social services. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of these measures has been reduced because of the overall situation of our national economy.

Under these conditions, in 1998 there were over 7.6 million people living in poverty and the poverty rate was 33.8 per cent. The households hardest hit are those in which the head of the family is either unemployed or is a farmer or a businessman in a non-agricultural sector. Individuals cannot overcome poverty by themselves. There is a need for concerted action by the State, public authorities and civil society working through a strategy enacted with programmes of action and policies that confront the various aspects and causes of poverty.

To this end, in 1997 we created, under the aegis of the presidency, the National Commission to Prevent and Combat Poverty to coordinate programmes in this area. Following the signing of the accord between the Government of Romania and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty was drafted and adopted in 1998. The fundamental purpose of the Strategy is to undertake a rigorous and complete study of poverty and its determining factors, while its overall objective is the elimination of extreme poverty and the containment of poverty, followed by the reduction of poverty to an acceptable economic, social and political level.

The people are aware that the way to combat poverty is to ensure employment and economic development. Our programmes in this area are optimistic, and the economic results for 2000 show that such optimism is well-founded. The economic decline has been halted, and there has been a slight increase in gross domestic product. The desire of the Romanian people to accede to the European Union, and the political consensus in favour of doing so, act as a catalyst for economic and social development. Preparation for integration is based on the national strategy for the economic development of Romania in the medium term and the plan of action for the implementation of that strategy.

The success our programmes to combat poverty and promote human dignity will essentially depend on our own efforts. In current international conditions, we cannot disregard the importance of cooperation between States and the effect that it can have.

Globalization is gradually affecting every country and all sectors of economic, political and social life. We expect positive results for individuals and groups. But the process will be a cause for concern if it does not offer increased and equal opportunities for employment, alleviate poverty, ensure respect for human rights and human values, promote equality and eliminate exclusion for both individuals and countries.

Market forces and rules cannot resolve the multitude of problems confronting the world. Thus, there is a need for greater cooperation to establish suitable rules for the global economy based on equality and democracy so that globalization can create conditions that will help us resolve the social problems confronting our countries.

In a globalized world, countries are increasingly encouraged to compete for foreign investment. To become competitive, countries are obliged to reduce taxes and create conditions to favour foreign

investment. They often reduce their social expenditure on health, education and social assistance. Such reductions particularly affect the poor, who no longer have access to such things as education and social services. That is the great challenge of globalization, which we — those who are responsible for social development — must accept and resolve.

We express the hope that this special session of the General Assembly will open up the way for new national and international actions to resolve the problems afflicting the modern world. We are aware of the fact that employment and social integration are of crucial importance. We should like to assure the President of the Assembly that our delegation will support him fully so as to ensure that this special session is a complete success.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Pehin Dato Haji Hussain Mohammed Yusof, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei Darussalam.

Mr. Yusof (Brunei Darussalam): On behalf of the Brunei Darussalam delegation, may I join other speakers in congratulating Mr. Gurirab on his election as President of the General Assembly at this session. I am fully confident that under his able and skilful guidance and leadership, this special session will be both productive and successful.

This special session is indeed of special significance, being held at the beginning of the new millennium. It is also being held at a time when social development issues are gaining prominence everywhere, particularly in the light of the recent financial crisis that engulfed East Asia. When we met five years ago in Copenhagen, various important aspects of economic and social development were highlighted. It is important to note that the Copenhagen Declaration included three core themes, namely, poverty eradication, employment expansion and social integration.

As a developing State, Brunei Darussalam remains committed to ensuring poverty eradication, social integration and productive employment, which will enable our people to achieve substantial social development. The economic and social structure of Brunei Darussalam is based upon a solid foundation on which Malay society, the Muslim religious faith and the monarchical political system interact. These traditional values have formed a firm foundation which has yielded a prosperous nation with strong family bonds and leadership committed to raising the standard of living for all the nation's citizens.

Our current, seventh, National Development Plan has been outlined, and its aim is to consolidate and strengthen measures to promote human-centred sustainable development with special emphasis on improving the quality of life of the people, maintaining full employment, increasing the level of productivity, fostering a more disciplined, self-reliant and caring society and ensuring a clean and healthy environment.

Although the economy has grown steadily, albeit moderately, as a result of the recent progress of recovery in the Asian region, our Government has exercised the utmost caution in its attempt to maintain quality of life within the country while at the same time working towards the efficient utilization of its financial resources to enhance the people's standard of living. The social policy programmes have enabled the Government to provide its people with the fundamental needs of society through the provision of a social safety net covering education, health, housing and infrastructure. The Government has allocated about 27.5 per cent of the total national development budget to social development programmes, which is indicative of the Government's continuing commitment to the overall economic development and prosperity of the people as well as to improving the quality of life for all the people of Brunei Darussalam.

In the area of social protection, pensions for the aged and disabled and the monthly assistance allowances granted to needy families and orphans were revised in July 1998. This revision incorporated an increase of 30 per cent for non-contributory pensions and monthly assistance allowances to the needy, and for the first time an education allowance was included for children aged 5 to 18 from needy families.

In the field of education, the citizens of Brunei Darussalam continue to be given free education from the age of five to the tertiary level, on the basis of ability. Our education policy stipulates the provision of at least basic education to all children of school age. Schools are provided throughout the country, in urban, rural and remote areas. The national education policy and programmes will continue to be geared towards developing human resources so that people, as agents of development, are responsive to changing needs and the challenges of the future.

Health is a key aspect of the quality of life, not only in its own right, but in its implication for other aspects of life. We believe that we should invest in health and that a healthy population will contribute fully to the economic and social development of the country. Brunei Darussalam has endorsed the Alma Ata Declaration of Health for All by the year 2000 and considers primary health care to be the key strategy to attain this goal. Emphasis has been given to the development of a health-care system based on a wide range of preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative health-care and support services to meet the needs of the population. Health care in Brunei Darussalam continues to be provided free to all citizens and permanent residents. The health status of the population has improved considerably, and Brunei Darussalam has achieved 9 of the World Health Organization's 10 target indicators of "health for all".

The unemployment rate is still relatively low in Brunei Darussalam, although our country has not been spared the effects of the recent financial crisis and its effect on employment. Nevertheless, in order to reduce the unemployment rate in the country, the Government continues to create more employment opportunities and take initiatives in providing informal training opportunities, primarily for early school drop-outs and the unemployed, so as to help prepare them for gainful employment. Ongoing training programmes have also been conducted at vocational and technical institutions in the fields of information technology, entrepreneurial and marketing skills.

The economic recovery in some parts of the world is indeed heartening, but the recent financial and economic downturn have served to remind us of the vulnerability of those economies that are heavily dependent on natural resources. It has exposed many weaknesses in social development. In this context, it is important, therefore, that we continue to put programmes into place that will ensure that our people can withstand temporary setbacks so that the benefits of economic growth are widely shared by our people.

A significant new player in social development during the last seven years in Brunei Darussalam has been the Employees' Trust Fund, entailing a mandatory contribution for retirement benefits. Since its creation, this fund has not only proved to be the largest institutional investor in the country but has also played a major complementary role in the provision of social protection in Brunei Darussalam today.

Looking ahead, the foremost economic challenge for Brunei Darussalam is the increasing need to diversify our economic base. This is important in order to achieve a proper balance between economic progress and social development in the country. Many developing countries have liberalized their economies and moved towards an open market as a means of generating economic growth. While opening up many opportunities, exposure to global markets also poses economic and political challenges. Thus, adjustments to the new economic climate are necessary, and these changes require time to implement them. We must always remember that countries are at different stages of development, and we believe that each country should be allowed to determine the pace of change, based on each country's needs, priorities and circumstances.

Nevertheless, international initiatives to facilitate the process of integration of social and economic development should be the focus of our attention at this session. The economic and financial crisis in some parts of the world, and political instability in some others, which have resulted in severe social degradation, should also be addressed seriously.

Brunei Darussalam has always attached great importance to promoting closer cooperation with other countries, especially with our Association of South-East Asian Nations neighbours, in all areas of mutual benefit, and particularly in the areas of social and economic cooperation. We also believe that Brunei Darussalam's membership in the United Nations has given us the opportunity to pursue and promote our foreign policies in multilateral forums, particularly in enhancing relations and developing friendship with other Member countries.

We also strongly believe that a fundamental, core element of social development is the coexistence of peace and stability. Without peace and stability, there can be few tangible prospects for advancing social progress and economic growth. In some parts of the world, economic downturns have reduced income and increased unemployment. This may also bring an unnecessarily gloomy outlook and instability to those unfortunate countries. Therefore, Brunei Darussalam has always held the belief that peace and stability constitute the fundamental cornerstone of political and economic progress as well as of social development.

I am hopeful and optimistic that the theme of our special session is relevant to current problems and will assist us in formulating action-oriented agendas of policies and programmes regarding the important role of social development in each country. It is important for us to make calculations in order to be sure about the future into which we are heading.

We must continue our crucial role in fostering cooperation to put social development at the centre of our commitments. The challenge for the coming years will be to unlock the potential for promoting social development that is inherent in many sectors of society, among local communities and within families. There is a clear need to break through traditional boundaries within government sectors, between governmental and non-governmental organizations and between the public and private sectors. Cooperation is essential, and this requires the creation of new partnerships for social development programmes between the different sectors of all levels of governance in societies.

Brunei Darussalam appreciates and welcomes the efforts under way in the United Nations to focus greater attention on social issues affecting all aspects of life, and we look forward to very fruitful and successful deliberations at this special session.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Al-Namla, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Namla (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express my country's greetings to the President, and to all. It is my privilege to express to this Assembly the greetings of the King of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Fahd Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, and Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz, the Crown Prince, Deputy President of the Council of Ministers, and Chief of the National Guard, and his Royal Highness, Sultan Bin Abdul-Aziz, the Second Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Minister of Aviation and Defence and General Inspector. Allow me also to express to the Government and the people of friendly Switzerland our great appreciation for having brought about this very important special session of the General Assembly to evaluate the implementation of the results of the World Summit for Social Development.

I would like to thank the Preparatory Committee and congratulate it on its selection of the title of this session; it truly reflects the results of our meetings. I would also like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his assumption of duties during this session.

In order to address the major challenges facing social development over the last five years, since the Copenhagen Summit, Governments — as has been seen in the report of the Secretary-General — have been able to set as their objectives the eradication of poverty, the creation of full employment and the building of societies where there is stability and security based on social development in its fullest sense.

Saudi Arabia has given constant attention to the Copenhagen Declaration and its commitments, and these commitments were taken into account when we prepared our social development plans. We have drawn inspiration from the Programme of Action that also came out of the Copenhagen Summit. I agree with the Secretary-General when he mentions in his report that the challenge facing the General Assembly in the present session is that of mobilizing political will and preparing general policies, strategies and practical methods in order to implement the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration. I also agree with the Secretary-General in his conclusions, where he refers to this.

Saudi Arabia has brought about the necessary political, social, economic and cultural environment to implement social development and has intensified its efforts to eradicate poverty. It has undertaken national measures in order to increase expenditure on social security, which in 1999 reached more than $12 billion, which we understand as a moral, political, religious and economic necessity.

As to reaching full employment, an economic and political social priority, Saudi Arabia is trying to create jobs for all of its citizens in all sectors. We are now trying to step up the employment of Saudis in civil sectors. There is free choice in welcoming workers of both genders mostly from developing countries. Saudi Arabia, along with everything that it offers foreign workers in terms of salaries, does not impose on them any form of tax. It provides every liberty for them to transfer their savings to their countries, and this represents billions of dollars. Workers who come for certain periods work with Saudi citizens and wish to stay with us at the end of their contracts. In trying to bring about social integration, Saudia Arabia has

followed the Koran, which promotes justice and tolerance and forbids injustice. The Koran upholds the dignity of the human being, whether man or woman, and calls for an end to all forms of discrimination. It preaches social solidarity and considers human rights one of the five vital necessities: religion, honour, spirit, reason and fortune.

Saudi Arabia respects the Cairo commitments that came out of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1990 and also respects the Declaration on fundamental labour standards of the International Labour Organization and has ratified a large number of international conventions relating to human rights.

As to ensuring jobs, working opportunities and health care, Saudi Arabia offers free education from pre-school to university for those living in its territory. There are schools throughout its territory; we provide education to sectors of society such as the disabled and elderly persons, as well as health care for everyone in order to ensure a society entirely free of diseases. Saudi Arabia has contributed to certain friendly and developing countries with unconditional relief assistance by means of multilateral, bilateral and regional channels, amounting to $75 billion until the end of 1999 and representing more than 4 per cent of our annual average gross domestic product. Seventy-two developing countries have benefited from that aid, including 41 African countries, 23 Asian countries and 8 developing countries from other continents.

This Saudi assistance for development represents emergency assistance under highly concessional terms, with a long period allowed for repayment. This means that these are not loans under commercial terms or conditional terms; the funds made available in this manner basically involve the funds' own resources, so as soon as they are repaid, new loans can be made.

I do not have the time here to go into all of the achievements with respect to social development, because these involve major programmes in many areas, including health, housing, agriculture, industry, electricity, water, desalination, communications, transport — all of these are supported by the State through grants and loans without interest. I am convinced that at the end of this session we will be able to meet our goals, which take into consideration the specificities and values of each country. Saudi Arabia will also be able to benefit from the conclusions of this meeting.

I should like to congratulate the Secretary-General and all of those assisting him on their efforts, particularly the members of the Preparatory Committee and the Secretariat, as well as the interpreters and others who assist us in communicating.

I wish this session every success.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Hamilton Lashley, Minister of Social Transformation of Barbados.

Mr. Lashley (Barbados): First, I wish to express my delegation's appreciation to the Swiss Government for hosting this conference and for the hospitality extended to all representatives.

I am deeply honoured to be here today with leaders from around the world, both government and non-governmental, to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Barbados to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of 1995. This document focused the world's attention on the critical need to establish a social framework in order to attain sustainable, people-centred development. Five years later, we can conclude that the goals and commitments of the Copenhagen Programme of Action remain both urgent and very necessary. The issues of poverty eradication, social integration and productive employment were brought to the forefront, and expectations were high that some positive steps would be taken to deal with these issues. Since then, there have been severe global constraints which have limited the efforts of many in the developing world to achieve the goals set and commitments made in 1995.

While global economic integration is creating opportunities for people around the world, there are still wide divergences among countries in the areas of expanding trade, attracting investments and using new technologies. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where economic growth has been widespread, the number of poor people increased by about 3 million a year in the first half of the 1990s, according to statistics from the World Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Against this dismal background, new challenges have also appeared. The scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and drug use and drug-trafficking threaten to divert resources allocated to social development and produce adverse effects on society in general and on the poor in particular. Barbados has been equally

affected by these socially challenging situations, but has maintained a policy of social transformation. We have focused on five areas for priority action: first, poverty eradication; secondly, promotion of social integration; thirdly, productive employment; fourthly, equality and equity between men and women; and fifthly and obviously, reducing the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The Ministry of Social Transformation, in collaboration with the Ministries of Finance and Health, non-governmental organizations and civil society, has taken progressive steps to address these areas. Together we share responsibility for a range of social services, which include child care, care of the elderly through the National Assistance Board, community development, welfare, urban development, disability, the Poverty Bureau and the Women's Bureau.

As I and many others emphasized less than a month ago at the Beijing + 5 summit in New York, the feminization of poverty globally is of growing concern. This phenomenon is no less true of my region — the Caribbean — where women are often the single heads of households. Consequently, in Barbados the eradication of poverty has been identified as a priority area for action for all vulnerable groups. The Government of Barbados has established a poverty eradication fund and has embarked on a series of measures to boost entrepreneurial activities to reduce unemployment among youth and women and, more importantly, to help empower their non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations. It should be noted that these efforts are funded solely by the Government of Barbados.

Barbados has also established a Social Investment Fund, which provides loans to poor or disadvantaged persons to develop small business entrepreneurship. An Urban Renewal Programme has been embarked upon, with the aim of transforming several difficult dwelling areas into more amenable housing sites for the poorest segments of our society. The objective of this development strategy is that poor persons be given the right to own land through the provision of grants by the Government.

Another poverty eradication initiative of this new Ministry has been the introduction of the Relief 2000 Programme, which focuses on intensive follow-up action to meet the needs of individuals and particularly large families headed by single parents. We are also in the process of converting the traditional Welfare Department into a Bureau of Family Affairs, so that the needs of the family, as a unit, may be met.

The National Assistance Board, whose mandate is to provide assistance mainly for the indigent and elderly, has shifted focus towards providing a more attractive living environment for its charges. A programme for the redesign of houses and the debushing of the properties of the indigent elderly, coupled with a proposed plan to provide a seven-day-a-week home-care service for them, are the main planks of our strategies.

Persons with disabilities constitute a group of persons who have been excluded from the mainstream of society. To this end, the Government has developed and introduced into Parliament a Green Paper which sets out policies, programmes and activities that will empower and protect persons with disabilities.

A national policy on ageing is currently being developed. Average life expectancy in Barbados is 72 years for males and 77 years for females. It is noteworthy, however, that there are over 164 centenarians living in Barbados. The policy on ageing seeks to ensure that older persons experience the quality of life necessary to maintain personal well-being, and is seen as a key element in preparations to meet the challenges of an ageing population.

Employment has been cited as one of the keys to achieving social integration. Barbados has created a Labour Market Information System, with the aim of facilitating universal and public access to timely labour-market-related information on issues that affect all categories of users. We have also established a Labour Market Information Advisory Committee to guide the activities of the system. This Committee is a partnership of the private and public sectors, trade unions and education and training institutions. Barbados is currently moving from a pattern of traditional community centres to that of resource centres where computers and various programmes will be made available to assist job-seekers and other persons in obtaining information.

In the process of tackling the problem of HIV/AIDS, Barbados has established a National Aids Committee to confront the complex problems associated with the HIV pandemic. Through the Committee, public-awareness programmes have been

instituted and the public sensitized and educated in AIDS- prevention programmes. Efforts to deal with this disease have been further supported by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), which represents a comprehensive response to the challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

While we make these efforts at the national level in pursuing the commitments made at Copenhagen, we see this Geneva 2000 special session as a time to review and reinvigorate the momentum for Governments, intergovernmental agencies, trade unions, employers, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, and all the other actors in civil society to work together on new initiatives to overcome our challenging environment. We see it also as an opportunity to promote strategies aimed at achieving social development and to work towards the full implementation of the commitments undertaken by developed and developing countries at the 1995 Summit for Social Development.

As I said at the Beijing + 5 conference, let me remind all representatives that we should let no obstacle be greater than the cause in our fight against the scourge of poverty.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Gladys Kokorwe, Vice-Minister of Local Government of Botswana.

Ms. Kokorwe (Botswana): It has been five years since the United Nations World Summit on Social Development was held. The thrust of the Summit was to cultivate an international consensus for concerted efforts towards, among other things, the effective eradication of poverty, the creation of productive jobs, and strengthened social integration. The hallmark of the Summit was the adoption of a Declaration that contains 10 critical commitments and a Programme of Action.

The thrust of the Declaration and Programme of Action is the attainment of sustainable development with people at its centre. This has indeed been the centrepiece of Botswana's development efforts from the inception of our first National Development Plan (1968-1973) to the current eighth (1997-2003). The goal is to raise the standard of living of the people of Botswana. All Government initiatives and programmes are therefore pursued in this spirit and, as such, guided by four national planning objectives: sustained development, rapid economic growth, economic independence and social justice.

Consistent with the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit, Botswana has developed a number of policies and programmes, within the framework of the eighth National Development Plan, that are set to advance the course of the Summit. These include the National Population Policy of 1997, the Women in Development Policy of 1995, the Youth Policy of 1996, the Industrial Development Policy of 1997 and our Vision 2016, to mention but a few.

The Government of Botswana, in collaboration with its development partners, such as the United Nations agencies, local non-governmental organizations and civil society, is engaged in the daunting task of implementing the various provisions of these policies. Policies such as those relating to women, youth and people with disabilities, and even initiatives that target children, particularly orphans from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, are relentlessly pursued to buttress the Government's efforts to improve people's lives. In the long term, when the aspirations and needs of the various population sub-groups are met, it is envisaged that this will contribute immensely to social integration — a commitment that we all share as members of the international community.

Our ability to implement such policies, geared towards improving human welfare, could not yield results in the absence of a conducive economic, legal, social and political environment. In this regard, the Government of Botswana has spared no effort in cultivating and nurturing an environment that allows sustainable development to take root. Politically, the country is reputed to be one of the working democracies in Africa. This derives largely from its tradition vested in the *kgotla* system, which allows people to express their views without hindrance while entrenching respect for one another. The Constitution also provides for the equality of all before the law regardless of status, colour, creed, religion or political orientation.

In the last few years, it has become apparent that, unlike their male counterparts, women were inadvertently not taking up positions in the decision-making cadre, nor were they seizing opportunities in the development process of the country.

The same observation was made during the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in

1995. The Government of Botswana has since identified six out of the 12 critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action and developed a Policy on Women in Development to address these issues. From this Policy, a National Gender Programme, which is a long-term vision for gender and development, was launched in 1998. It is intended to promote gender awareness in development planning, education and skills training; to enhance women's health, including their reproductive health and rights; and to advocate the elimination of all negative economic and cultural practices and laws which promote inequalities among men and women.

There has been marked progress in this area. For example, during the recent national elections held in October 1999, the proportion of women in Parliament rose from 9 per cent in 1994 to 18 per cent, and from 6.6 per cent in 1994 to 45 per cent in 1999 in the Cabinet. In the latter case, the 30 per cent target stipulated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development has been surpassed. At the level of local government, however, female representation still falls below the 30-per-cent minimum recommended by the SADC Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Copenhagen Summit identified the issue of poverty as one of the most critical concerns facing the world and as one that has to be tackled with vigour. We in Botswana had long accepted this challenge and adopted it as one of our broad policy goals. This was made even more necessary by the outcome of the 1985-1986 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, which showed that 59 per cent of the population were living in poverty. The majority were in rural areas. Following concerted efforts by the Government to reduce poverty, a study undertaken in 1993 and 1994 recorded a decrease of 12 per cent in poverty levels.

The most immediate cause of poverty amongst our people is lack of income, which in turn is related to lack of wage employment and insufficient opportunities for self-employment. Botswana is tackling this problem through various initiatives that fall under the broad areas of economic diversification, citizen economic empowerment, public sector reform and financial discipline. We are also channelling resources through various programmes, such as the Old Age Pension, the Destitute Relief Programme and Agricultural Assistance Schemes, to disadvantaged groups and those prone to extreme poverty. We realize however, that there is a need to develop strategies for improved targeting of such programmes and also for promoting a greater level of community involvement and participation in development activities.

Tackling unemployment is rated equally high in Botswana's current development plan. Whereas Botswana experienced rapid economic growth of about 10 per cent per annum in the past two decades, which created many job opportunities, this has not kept pace with the growing number of job seekers. The most recent data from the 1998 Demographic Survey placed unemployment at an estimated 19.6 per cent of the labour force. This represents a decrease of 1.9 per cent from the 21.5 per cent estimated in 1996. These could be encouraging statistics, but a lot remains to be done.

Government strategy is to bring down unemployment through diversified economic growth. To this end, the Government is in the process of identifying industries and products that enjoy a comparative advantage and attract foreign direct investment in line with the trend of globalization. We are also committed to the development of a healthy and skilled national human resource base that will enable us to carry forward development in our country. Our domestic efforts should, however, necessarily be complemented by a supportive global environment that will enable us to better address the challenges of globalization.

In conclusion, Botswana is fully committed to the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. We have made some substantial progress in some areas and acknowledge that a lot remains to be done in many other areas. We shall spare no effort in realizing the good intentions of the Summit.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Juan Federico Bosch, Vice-Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Uruguay.

Mr. Bosch (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to have been appointed head of the delegation of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay and to participate in this special session of the General Assembly to assess the impacts of the implementation of the commitments undertaken in Copenhagen and to look at social development during the current globalization process.

In the last 15 years, the central objectives of my country's economic policies have been to reduce inflation, which is considered the most onerous burden on the fixed-income sectors of the population; to be more open to the outside by reducing tariffs; to join the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR); and to have a tax policy that helps balance the public-sector accounts.

We can say that our country has grown economically. Indeed, according to data provided by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, if we compare the purchasing power of wages in 1995 and 1999, we can see that there has been approximately 4 per cent growth during that period. Gross domestic product from 1991 to 1998 grew by 34.5 per cent, using constant values for 1983.

With respect to income distribution and concentration in the period 1990-1997, the share of total income for the poorest 40 per cent of households increased from 20 to 22 per cent; while the richest 10 per cent of households saw a reduction in their share of total income from 31 to 25.8 per cent. Nonetheless, in the biennium 1998-1999 there was a trend towards the concentration of income.

In the regional context, our country shows a high level of social development. This is not only because of economic growth, but also because of a concern for social justice, the continuity of which has been promoted during these years by the high degree of democratic stability.

In 1997 Uruguay ranked third in Latin America in the human development index and it had the lowest level of poverty. When the human development index is adjusted using the Gini coefficient, our country is number 1 in terms of human development. The proportion of households below the poverty line has gone from 12 per cent in 1990 to 6 per cent in 1997.

Uruguay has undertaken profound educational reform. For more than a century the Uruguayan approach to education has been based on obligatory lay schooling and free education at the primary, secondary and university levels. In addition, it has been necessary to set new objectives. The basic guidelines for this reform process are based on the need to recast the role of education as a factor in the development of cultural and scientific awareness and in increasing the human resources of the country, giving greater dynamism to the channels of social mobility and modernizing the relationship between education and the productive process. In our view, this education reform has been one of the aspects of social policy that has had the greatest impact on overcoming poverty in sectors where poverty persists.

At the beginning of 1995 we extended our education programmes to include children of four and five years of age, thus allowing them to be socialized early and women to join the labour market. Schools have improved their service by means of what is known as the full-time school, which meets the nutritional and health needs of the neediest sectors of the population. In Uruguay today, these new models for schools make it possible to deal with the difficulties faced by the 40 per cent of students who come from households that lack basic needs.

At the Copenhagen Summit we made a commitment to promote universal and fair access to education and health services, and to equality between men and women in the workplace. Our country has allocated 10 per cent of its gross domestic product to health, and public expenditures represent 28.6 per cent of the country's total expenditures on health. The neediest part of our population has absolutely free health care. The illiteracy rate has dropped from 4.3 to 2.1 per cent. In the last three years the infant mortality rate has decreased 20 per cent.

As regards employment, the main political measure has been the creation of an open, dynamic and growing economy. Special emphasis has been placed on training workers and incorporating new technology.

Our President, Mr. Jorge Batlle Ibáñez, who took office in March of this year, and his Administration are committed to modernizing the country by introducing new technology; reactivating the productive sectors, particularly in the agricultural area; training workers; and ensuring that we have an economy that generates high-quality, productive jobs, with an emphasis on sustainable human development.

The quality of Uruguay's natural products is such that they can compete internationally, provided that countries and groups of countries adopt measures to eliminate subsidies and other protectionist policies. It is impossible to ask a country such as ours to maintain an acceptable level of human development if we cannot create worthy jobs for our people. This depends not only on national policies, but also on the foreign-trade policies of other countries and regions.

Uruguay has a long history of respect for the rights of workers, and almost none of our labour agreements have been brought before the International Labour Organization. This indicates that our workers enjoy a high level of well-being. This, however, becomes an obstacle when our labour is considered expensive compared to that of other countries that do not offer the same working conditions for their workers.

Our agricultural products are excellent, free of chemical additives and contaminants. Nonetheless, the high level of protectionism of blocs of industrialized countries greatly limits the expansion of our exports, thus restricting our possibilities for creating real jobs.

We therefore wonder if one of the topics for this special session, as it looks at social development in a more globalized world, should not be to recommend a study of the impact on many countries' domestic economies of the developed countries' high levels of subsidies and protectionist policies. These policies make it very difficult to improve our social development. This is why, although the economic and social indicators for Uruguay have put us in a very privileged place, in the last few years we have started to feel both the positive and negative aspects of globalization.

We are an open country that offers economic and financial stability to any foreign investment that is in line with our laws. We feel it is essential for an economy like Uruguay's to enjoy the stimulus of foreign investment. But we also seek reciprocity in our trade relations with the other countries of the world. Although Uruguay still has its guarantees of stability, there is a part of the population that feels dissatisfaction at the current reduction in industrial and productive activity.

The radical changes in production affect all workers, irrespective of their social levels. The ability to be retrained marks the very clear line between those social groups that can withstand those changes unscathed and those that are left in their wake.

Uruguayans are losing the certainty that is part of the feeling of well-being, and they view this as an inherent consequence of the new international scene.

It is increasingly imperative that equality of opportunity become universal as we progress towards a new world economy. That equality should exist without obstacles or subsidies and should make it possible for all countries, be they developed or not, to have access to a life of dignity and to all rights, without regard to race, creed, nationality or gender. Our common efforts in the field of social development will be in vain if we are not able to remove the restrictions that artificially limit the viability of our societies.

We appeal from this rostrum for an international commitment to dismantle the protectionist mechanisms in commerce that today impede the fair development of international labour markets.

At the dawn of a new millennium, we should resolve to reduce the gap in equality between countries in order to bring about just social development. This is an outstanding social debt that we should settle in order to achieve healthy development for all the inhabitants of the planet, especially for children and young people.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alisher Vohidov, Chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Today, five years after the Copenhagen Summit, we see encouraging signs that the issue of social development has been placed at the forefront of many national and international agendas. The international community is increasingly focusing its development strategy through a people-centred vision. Let me take this opportunity to share with the Assembly our brief assessment of the implementation in Uzbekistan of the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit during recent years.

In the short time since 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan has taken a significant step in transforming itself from a totalitarian administrative command system to a free market economy. When Uzbekistan gained its independence, it became possible and essential to conduct an independent policy of renewal and progress. Making a priority of the needs and interests of the people, enhancing their well-being, creating new democratic institutions of power and forming a civil society have been set as the cornerstones of that policy. Realizing that policy first requires the maintenance of peace and civil accord in society.

Realizing the importance of this, and taking into account the socio-economic situation in the Republic at the beginning stages of reform, the Government of Uzbekistan has developed its own path of reform and

progress, which incorporates the principles that provide social accord. The Republic's approach is oriented towards the establishment of a socially oriented market economy. The basic idea of this approach is to create our own model of economic development that brings together the rules of market relations.

The basis of the national model is defined by five key principles: the primacy of economy over politics, the leading role of the State in organizing and bringing about economic reforms, the supremacy of law, the evolution of market relations and a strong social policy. The evolution of market relations should be accompanied by the realization of effective pre-emptive measures for the social protection of the population of the Republic that reflect the Republic's demographic specifics and the traditions, customs, mentality and lifestyle of its people. The realization of these measures in Uzbekistan has special value, since the belief of the people in the need to bring about these reforms depends on it. The results of social and economic reforms will make it possible to bring about stability of the Republic.

The numerous priorities of the Copenhagen Declaration necessitate the eradication of poverty. Creating social harmony depends directly on the level of social integration of vulnerable groups in the population. We must have social guarantees and access to distribution systems. In this context, it is important to have an income support policy for vulnerable families.

The Republic of Uzbekistan is a country with great labour resources. It has about 40 per cent of all the labour resources of Central Asia.

In the process of further deepening the economic reforms in Uzbekistan, economically inefficient jobs are being eliminated, the level of liberalization in the labour market is growing, and there is also growth in the professional and vocational sectors and in geographic mobility. Measures to prevent mass dismissals, the development of alternative forms of employment, structural shifts in manufacturing, and expanded privatization have prevented extreme growth in unemployment in the Republic.

Strengthening the role of women and increasing their participation has special significance in the maintenance of social integration. According to the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan, women are provided with access equal to that of men to State service and to all levels of State management and public affairs. Women make up 44 per cent of the total labour force of the Republic, including 32.9 per cent of the industrial sector, 35.1 per cent of the agricultural sector, and 28.7 per cent in government.

I would like to emphasize that within the framework of my country's model of transition towards a socially-oriented market economy, we have created a stable legal basis that provides and encourages social justice, equality of opportunity for men and women, respect for the rights and basic freedom of citizens and de jure and de facto eradication of discrimination.

We are convinced that coordinated efforts by the international community are necessary to bring about global trends in social policy to eradicate poverty, provide productive employment and strengthen social integration. The United Nations and its specialized agencies — working in cooperation with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral institutions engaged in social development issues — can and should render assistance to countries in the process of progressive transformation to maintain economic growth and achieve further social development.

In conclusion, we believe that the most promising and effective way to provide assistance is to first of all extend that assistance to those countries that maintain the necessary level of political and social stability. The establishment of such priorities would make possible effective investment and accelerated social and economic development, thereby ensuring that those countries contribute adequately to global human development.

In this regard, Uzbekistan considers that a special fund should be set up under the auspices of the United Nations to provide support and protection for social programmes in countries that are resolutely carrying out radical economic, social and political measures to effect change based on the principles of the protection of human rights and freedoms, dignity, equality, respect, mutual responsibility and cooperation.

We understand and greatly appreciate the importance of this special session. Despite the difficulties involved in the preparatory process, the results of the discussions and the documents adopted will undoubtedly make a significant contribution to promoting the progress and social development of all the nations of the world.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.